

Witness

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The Darkness Within

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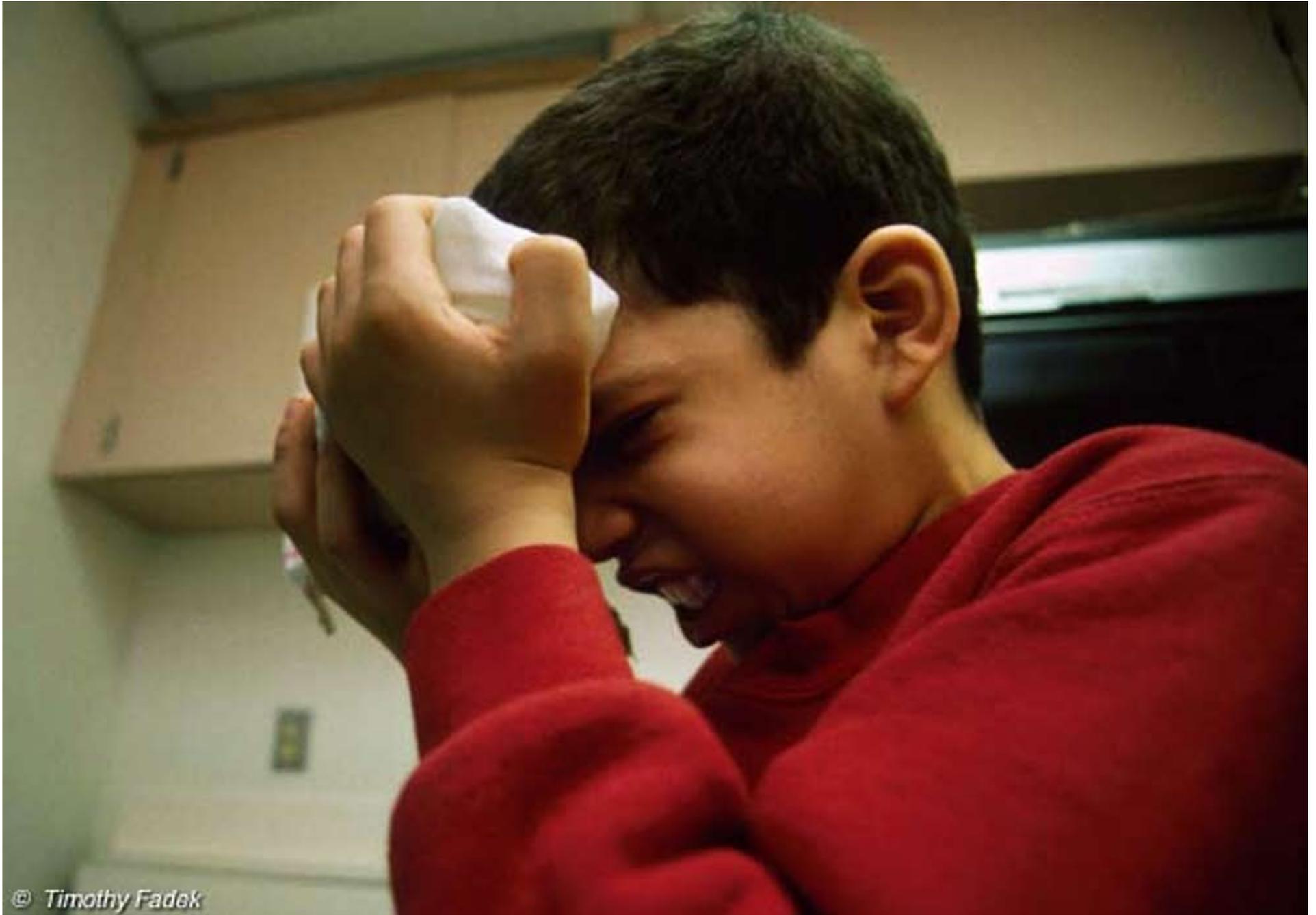
Psychiatric Ward for Children
at Mount Sinai Medical Center
New York

The psychiatric ward at Mount Sinia Medical Center is a one-month emergency room for emotionally disturbed children. It is not a long-term care facility. The purpose of the ward is to immediately stabilize the patients within that month so that psychotic and dangerous behavior is reduced or halted until long-term care is found.

Through the use of therapeutic drugs, physical restraints to control them when they get angry and violent, and daily counseling, nurses and psychiatrists are usually able to reach the children. However, the process can often be very traumatic to the young patients because the initial road to recovery means that they have to come face to face with their fears and inner demons.

Many of these kids were suicidal. Sadly, their cases are all too common. Often, they were abused at home -- raped by a mother's boyfriend, beaten daily by a drunken father, ridiculed by a drug addicted stepmother -- to name but a few real and tragic examples.

This essay is an inside look at the difficult processes which are the first and painful steps on the long road to possible recovery.



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Danny puts ice on his head. In a fit of anger, he slammed his head against a wall.



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One of the young patients hides as another is handed his medications. Asked why he doesn't want to take his medicine, Danny replies "it tastes nasty."

After a very upsetting day, Julissa is encouraged to drink some sleep-inducing Benadryl.



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Lorenzo demands to be let out of the padded “quiet room.”



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Jeremy is comforted by one of the nurses. After three weeks in the ward, he is frightened to leave its relative security and return to his former life at home with his parents. He feels safer here.



The staff at the center follows a standard procedure when a child begins to lose control. First, they will try to calm him by talking. Next, they will try to hold and comfort him. If this does not work and the aggression becomes uncontrollable, they have no choice but to strap him down.

Following an extremely violent outburst, Francisco is wrapped in a papoose. The papoose is used to suppress the child's aggressive behavior -- preventing them from hurting themselves or anyone else.





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Depending on the condition of the child, the center will try different forms of therapy in order to help them. Too often, after a traumatic situation children stop talking. Sheena is one of these children. Here she is participating in a dance and movement exercise. It is a non-verbal approach of therapy used to reach kids who will not speak.



Lying down in his room, Robert would spend much of his time staring at the ceiling. Two snapshots of his family adorn the wall.



Willy talks to his mother on the phone.



The children are encouraged to play board games. It stimulates them and occupies their time. Sheena sits in front of a plastic holder for one such game.



This project is a production of

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Vision Project is an organization dedicated to the development of documentary photography and educational programming related to still photography.

The goal of Vision Project is to produce documentary material and educational programs that encourage understanding and awareness about a broad variety of social issues. This information and programming are made available to the general public with a particular focus on members of the younger generation.

Vision Project seeks to reinforce the social, cultural and historical contribution that visual documentary work contributes to society. To reach these goals, we have assembled a group of talented professionals with extensive expertise in photography, web technology, journalism, design, and education.

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After four weeks in the ward, Willy is nervous as he waits to go home. He will not be going back to his parents. This time he will be in the custody of his grandmother.